

VZCZCXRO8839
PP RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHIHL RUEHKUK RUEHMOS
DE RUEHGB #0601/01 0561616
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 251616Z FEB 06
FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2911
RHEHNSC/WHITE HOUSE NSC WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BAGHDAD 000601

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/25/2016
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINS](#) [KDEM](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: SITUATION UPDATE SATURDAY: VIOLENCE DIMINISHING
AS BAGHDAD CURFEW REMAINS IN EFFECT

REF: A. BAGHAD 594
[B](#). BAGHDAD 591

Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR Robert S. Ford, for Reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: By most accounts, Baghdad saw fewer acts of sectarian violence on 25 February than it had over the previous several days, largely due to the extended curfew still in effect. A variety of contacts told us that anti-Sunni violence had occurred overnight February 24-25, especially around Baghdad's Adhamiya district. We should expect some more reports of gun battles and skirmishes in the Baghdad area on Saturday night, but overall the violence appears to be diminishing. The Sunni Arab leadership is talking with Shia leaders, including those connected to the Shia militia thought most involved in security problems. Early Saturday evening Sunni and Shia clerics and political leaders from the Sadrist movement appeared on national TV calling for an end to sectarian violence. END SUMMARY

ON THE STREET OF BAGHDAD

[1](#)2. (C) MoI and MoD sources reported to MNF-I that the number of deaths dropped for the second day in a row. Indications are that the body count will be lower at the end of February 25 than in previous days.

Curfew Helping

[1](#)3. (C) A variety of Iraqi contacts credit the curfew with helping. For example, Aida Ossairan, Deputy Minister for Human Rights and Harith Hassan, Deputy Chief Electoral Officer, told PolOff on February 25 that due to the continued declaration of emergency procedures and curfew which is in place, the city remains calm and the general population no longer expects violence during the day. According to Ossairan, traffic throughout the province and city is generally light, with only official vehicles allowed on the roads. However, these two contacts, and others, fear that violence could spark after dark. During the late afternoon of February 25 the government announced the curfew would continue, applied to vehicular traffic, through Sunday.

Small Fighting Friday Night in Baghdad

14. (C) Allawi ally Saad al-Janabi told PolOff the evening of February 24 black-clad fighters had attacked the famous Sunni Abu Hanifa mosque in Adhamiya, and shot into Adhamiya's al- Numan Hospital.

Al-Adhamiyah District Council Chairman, Hassam Kajem Abd Allah, told PolOff February 25 There was considerable activity in the Al-Adhamiyah district overnight with reports from local political figures and residents stating sniper fire and attacks started at dusk on February 24 and continued until U.S. Forces started patrolling the city later in the evening. The chairman also told PolOff that residents of Al-Adhamiyah were continuing to protect the community and mosques from terrorists. MNF-I confirms some instances of small-arms fire and sniping during the night of 24 February in Adhamiya. (Comment: It is not clear that any group actually attacked the mosque; there was simply shooting near it. The reports of attacks on the mosque itself suggest how nervous the Sunni community in Adhamiya is. End Comment.)

Ulema Council Head Also Makes News - Wrongly

15. (C) District Council Chairman of Abu Ghreib, Hamed Al-Amery, told PolOff February 25 that units from MOI continue to enter the district and that the residents are afraid they will attack the citizens

BAGHDAD 00000601 002 OF 003

and occupy the mosques. On February 25, several Sunni contacts called urgently warning that a Ministry of Interior brigade had attacked the Baghdad home of Muslim Ulema Council leader Harith al-Dhari. Subsequent checking through MNF-I confirmed that there was no truth to the allegations. Instead, it appears that an accidental firefight broke out between two ISF units, one of which was protecting a funeral procession near Dhari's house. (Comment: This is another indication of how nervous the Sunni Arabs are now. End Comment.)

16. (C) Saifaldin Abd al-Rahman, Chief of Staff to the TNA Speaker, told PolOff February 25 that the situation is the worst he had seen since return to Iraq in 2003. He said Sunni mosques in the Salhiya neighborhood of Baghdad had been attacked the night of February 24 and were using loudspeakers to call for help. He described the violence as a concerted effort by the Shia Coalition to target Sunni Arab areas bordering Shia areas in Baghdad. He claimed that the curfew is not helping, as Iraq Security Forces are involved in the attacks. Despite the curfew, he was able to meet representatives from the Iraqi Islamic Party February 24 to discuss the next Parliament - he said he drove past three police cars and three police stations without being stopped.

Political Figures Weighing In

17. (C) Shaykh Jalal ad-Din as-Saghir told PolCouns midday February 25 that he had received no reports of attacks against Shia so far during the day. (This was in sharp contrast to Thursday and Friday, he stated.) He said the curfew appeared better enforced and thus more effective; it had been too lax on Thursday and Friday, he commented. He urged

that CF take a more visible role, including using helicopters and aircraft to remind people their presence. PolCouns noted that CF have stepped up their patrols, but that Iraqi Security Forces must play their part too as must political leaders like Saghir. Saghir dismissed the ISF as too weak still and insisted the CF must help them. He pledged he would work to calm the Shia street, and that his Friday sermon had aimed at doing that. However, the latest attacks had made public opinion very volatile within the Shia community, he warned. He also highlighted that greater CF visibility in locales where Shia and Sunni populations are mixed, such as Mahmudiya and Lutifiya south of Baghdad, would be especially helpful. He concluded that so far the news on Saturday was better and suggested there is now an opportunity for the government to calm a nervous public.

Political Talks Underway

¶8. (C) Sunni Arab Iraqi Islamic Party official Ala'a Mekki confirmed that the leaders of the Tawafuq Coalition, Adnan Dulaymi, Khalif Alayan and Tariq al-Hashimi, met with President Talabani and others the evening of February 24. Mekki said Talabani agreed to Tawafuq's ten demands. They plan to meet again February 25. The Islamic Party issued a communiqué on February 25 saying that it welcomed the Prime Minister's announcement promising mosques of all communities would be protected and pledging an investigation into the Samarra bombing. The Islamic Party's communiqué said it hoped the Government would make good on its pledges. It said that if there was movement on the February 23 Tawafuq Front demands (ref b), then it would rejoin the political talks about forming a new government.

¶9. (C) IIP's Ala'a Mekki told us February 24 that Tariq al-Hashimi and Ayad Samarai had met that day with Sadrists Salam al Maliki and Baha al Araj, who stated they are not responsible for the violence. According to Mekki, the atmosphere in the meeting between the Sadrists and the Iraqi Islamic Party was generally good. He anticipated that Hashimi and al-Maliki plan to issue a joint press statement today calling for peace. The Sadrists reportedly claimed many fighters are attacking in the name of Moqtada

BAGHDAD 00000601 003 OF 003

al-Sadr and Jaysh al Mahdi (JAM), but were not JAM members. Mekki added that there were multiple reports of JAM attacks throughout Baghdad. In Mada'in, for example, he said that the JAM overtook a mosque and announced from the loudspeaker for Sunnis to stay in their homes or they would be killed that night.

¶10. (U) As this cable was being sent, Iraqiya TV began broadcasting a two-part press conference. The first part included joint press statements by Sunni Arab Muslim Ulema Council cleric Abdel Selam al-Kubaysi and Sadrist cleric Fadhil ash-Shara that called for national unity. They condemned attacks on mosques and said that the Ulema Council, the Office of the Martyr Sadr and the Khalisi Foundation (close to the Ulema Council) would establish a committee to investigate what had caused the violence. It then showed the Shia and Sunni clerics praying together. Iraqiya TV then showed a live press conference with Iraqi Party leaders Ayham Samarraie and Ala'a Mekki with Sadrist Baha ad-Din al-Araji calling also for national unity. Mekki in his statement said the Sadrists would support the

February 23 demands presented by the Tawafuq Front.

Comment

¶11. (C) The situation is still tense, and we should expect more reports of skirmishes and small gun battles on Saturday night in parts of Baghdad. That said, our sense is that barring some spectacular new terror attack, the worst of this latest spasm of sectarian violence is past. The Sadrist move to reach out publicly to the Muslim Ulema Council and the Iraqi Islamic Party will carry especially strong symbolism for many. Extending the curfew - for vehicle traffic - will also help improve the security situation. The underlying causes of the sectarian violence, of course, so far have not been addressed.

KHALILZAD